**New Year’s Gardening Resolutions**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

**Texas A&M Water Conservation and Technology Center**

Where are you in your gardening? Have you expanded your knowledge level, tried anything new or introduced anyone who would benefit by gardening to the hobby?

If you answered no to all the questions, maybe it is time to produce a few New Year’s resolutions related to your gardening experience.

* Children who are introduced and participate in gardening do better in school and are more content with their lives, according to research, some of which was conducted in San Antonio. Consider volunteering at your neighborhood school or help your grandchildren, children or neighborhood children set up their own gardens.
* Refurbish your vegetable garden to produce extra vegetables that you can donate to the Food Bank or another worthy cause.
* Go through the chemicals in your garden shed. Identify any materials that have sat unused for more than 6 months and box them up for the next pesticide disposal day. Also discard unlabeled or solidified material. Call 311 to find out where and when you can discard the materials.
* Consider joining the Master Gardeners or Gardening Volunteers of South Texas. They offer training and volunteer opportunities. Master Gardener chapters exist in Bexar, Guadalupe and Comal counties. Call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office. Projects range from plantings where you can dig in the dirt to those where you teach your neighbors about water conservation. For the Master Gardeners, the phone number in Bexar County is (210) 467-6575, Comal County is (830) 620 3440 and Guadalupe County is (**830)303-3889**. The Gardening Volunteer website is [gardeningvolunteers.org](http://www.gardeningvolunteers.org/gvstwp/).
* Consider a new type of gardening. Select one that will require some study of new techniques. Water gardening, bonsai, orchid gardening, wildscape and oriental vegetables are just a few to consider.
* Obtain a publication on drip irrigation and convert part of your sprinkler system to drip. It is especially well suited for vegetables, flowers, shrubs and containers. It will save you money and result in better plants. Visit [thehillcountrygardener.com](http://www.thehillcountrygardener.com/) website to check out Tom Harris’ Drip Gardening booklet.
* Plant a wildlife thicket somewhere in the yard to provide feeding and nesting sites for the many species of birds we have in South Texas. Make the thicket at least 10 feet x 10 feet and have a good plant mix. Consider viburnum, pyracantha, agarita, hollies and calamondin.
* If you don’t have a compost pile, start one. It is a great way to use leaves, pulled weeds, lawn clippings and even kitchen scraps. To have the ingredients breakdown to compost fast, have about 60 percent green material and 40 percent brown, such as dry leaves or straw. If you don’t have enough green material, add several cups of lawn fertilizer to provide the extra nitrogen.
* Another way to use your gardening knowledge is to volunteer to be on your neighborhood, church or school landscape committee. Be an advocate for reasonable water use and environmentally appropriate landscaping.
* Convert part of your lawn to a low-water-use landscape. Consider hardscape, groundcovers, perennials, mulch and other low-water-use plants. Select plants so you have 12 months of color. For ideas and even some financial help, visit the San Antonio Water System website at <http://www.saws.org/>.

Happy New Year and Good Gardening!